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ABSTRACT

At a UNESCO meeting of representatives of international nongovernmental workers and cooperative organizations, the delegates laid particular emphasis on the correlation between political, economic, and social problems on the one hand, and educational, cultural, and training activities on the other. The participants especially stressed the need for increased priority to be given to economic and vocational education, provided through trade union and cooperative organizations; for agricultural and industrial workers; craftspersons, manual workers, and intellectual workers; unemployed persons; and the increasing number of workers obliged to change jobs. The delegates reported a need to encourage self-reliance in the developing countries, self-help activities in rural and urban areas, and measures to reduce unemployment and promote self-management or worker participation in the management of cooperatives and companies. The role and prominence of transnational corporations in relation to people's lives, and particularly in relation to the working population, was also highlighted with a request for more study of the effects of these corporations throughout the world. The delegates stressed the significance of education in social change, in technological change, and in relationship to the creation of world peace. They stressed the participation of workers' and peasants' organizations in the conception and implementation of educational policies and created a series of recommendations for adult education. These recommendations cover the aims and roles of adult education, the target groups, the content, the methods and materials, the institutional forms, the role and participation of trade unions, cooperatives, popular educational movements, and suggestions for action. (KC)

PARIS, 8 July 1983

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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

MEETING OF EXPERTS TO CONSIDER WAYS AND MEANS OF TAKING THE WORKERS' INTERESTS INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING ADULT EDUCATION POLICIES

(Paris, 25-29 April 1983)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of Unesco, experts from international non-governmental workers' and co-operative organizations met from 25 to 29 April 1983 to discuss various aspects of education, both education in general and adult and workers' education in particular. This meeting, which had been proposed by non-governmental organizations having consultative status with Unesco, was convened by the Director-General (paragraph 1298 of 21 C/5 Approved). It provided an opportunity for a broad exchange of views and experience between the most representative international non-governmental organizations, but included, as well, several autonomous regional and national organizations not affiliated to the world trade union confederations.

The meeting was opened by Mr P.J. Mhaiki, Director of the Literacy, Adult Education and Rural Development Division, representing the Director-General, Mrs M. D'Cruz (India) was then elected Chairman. Mr J. Gonzalez (Venezuela), Mrs R. Kalinkina (USSR) and Mr W. Taha (Syria) were elected Vice-Chairmen, and Mrs P. Eames (New Zealand), Rapporteur.

The meeting followed on from a similar one organized by Unesco in 1975. The participants confirmed the value of those meetings and of the resulting recommendations and conclusions. While the main courses of action decided on by the previous meeting were still valid and clearly of current interest, even calling for intensified implementation, the participants also emphasized a number of phenomena which had been less apparent at the time of the previous meeting.

They laid particular emphasis on the correlation between political, economic and social problems on the one hand, and educational, cultural and training activities on the other. There was the world situation, which was deteriorating both in the developing and in the industrialized countries; the economic crisis affecting the population of an increasing number of countries; various threats of a political, sociological and ecological nature; the struggle of peoples for their freedom and independence, particularly against dictatorship and oppression; and the struggle of workers and peasants to protect their human dignity and improve their standard of living--all these and many other problems called for educational activities co-ordinated with the campaigns to solve the major problems of mankind and directed towards achieving more active participation by the workers in political and economic life, as well as in decision-making in the management of public affairs. Education was a powerful weapon and was neither isolated nor separate from the other aspects of political life.

The participants laid special stress on the need for increased priority to be given to economic and vocational education, provided through trade union and co-operative organizations, for agricultural and industrial workers (men and women), craftsmen and the tertiary sector, manual and intellectual workers, the unemployed and the increasing numbers of workers obliged to change jobs. What had to be done, in fact, was to encourage self-reliance in the developing countries, self-help activities in rural and urban areas, and measures to reduce unemployment and promote self-management or worker participation in the management of co-operatives and companies.

The role and prominence of transnational corporations in relation to people's lives, and particularly in relation to the working population, was also highlighted. The transnational corporations were a challenge to national sovereignty and independence, economic independence and social cohesion, as well as to cultural identity, the protection of endogenous values, ideals and mutual understanding. These corporations were as interested in the natural wealth and industrial production of the developing countries as in the culture, the level of information, and the social and ethical values of their people. The participants unanimously requested that these problems should be given greater priority both in the activity of the international, regional and national non-governmental organizations and within Unesco.

In addition to the problems which can and must be gradually solved by national efforts and within groups of countries in the same region, there is an increasing number of problems which are affected by lack of international or regional solidarity. Similarly, it is true to say that the destabilization of national entities, the arms race, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, trade imbalances, inflation, famine, poverty, the debts of the Third World countries, illiteracy, ecological devastation, and dangerous conflicts could be, if not completely eliminated, at least attenuated if national and international solidarity played a stronger, more sustained and unequivocal role. Co-operative and workers' movements, which have a long tradition of promoting solidarity between workers, should continue along these same lines by enriching the content of education and culture and adapting it to current world problems.

The aim of adult education may be distorted by a paternalistic approach on the part of certain organizers, legislators, or sources of financing of the various educational and/or cultural activities. This reflects the awareness of the role played by the level of knowledge in the scientific and technological revolution, and the modernization of channels for the communication and spread of knowledge and skills. For the organizations responsible for adult education in urban and rural areas and for the education and training of co-operative, agricultural and industrial workers, it is thus becoming most important to see that the nature, content and methods of the educational process are not diverted from education's fundamental objectives and are protected from any tendency towards paternalism and indoctrination. The objectives of workers' training should lead to the workers having greater control over their own education, and to their freedom.

All these considerations led the participants to broaden considerably the field of their discussion and their consultation of each other. In discussing ways and means of 'taking the workers' interests into consideration when formulating and implementing adult education policies' (as the title of the meeting indicates), they recognized and emphasized the interrelationship and interdependence between educational activities as a whole and adult education, and between general education systems and education systems specifically designed for workers and their families. It is becoming essential to 'take the workers' interests into consideration' when formulating and implementing education policies as a whole. The present and future of the workers are affected as much (if nor more) by the school and the university--i.e. by education from early childhood up to old age--as by workers' education and trade union training alone. At the same time, the strategy and nature of education systems should be more influenced by the interests and ideals of workers and their co-operative, trade union and educational organizations. The participants expressed the hope, therefore, that these problems, or rather this approach, would receive greater attention in the day-to-day activities of the organizations concerned (with allowance made for the actual situation of workers in different countries and the opportunities open to them) and that they would be taken into account as far as possible in preparation for the Fourth International Conference on Adult Education.

The ensuing discussion on specific agenda items clarified certain aspects, brought out points of divergence or convergence and led to the formulation of many joint conclusions and recommendations.

The importance of education--general as well as vocational, civic and cultural--for workers, particularly as a means to reduce social inequalities

All the participants recognized the special importance--from the point of view of the non-governmental organizations present at the meeting--of reducing social, cultural and educational inequalities. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the education system as a whole (for children, adolescents and adults) and not only education

'for' or 'of' the workers, could or should contribute, if it was not already doing so, to the reduction of social inequalities. Similarly, all participants recognized that social inequalities could be affected by all spheres of education--general education as well as vocational, civic or 'political' (certain participants preferring the latter term to the former), cultural and aesthetic education, etc. It would be necessary to consider workers' education in the broadest sense, as all those components were as essential as trade union or co-operative education.

Therefore, while the specific purpose of the meeting was to consider ways and means of taking the workers' interests into consideration when formulating and implementing adult education policies, the participants felt that the links between initial education and further education were so strong that workers' interests should be taken into account in formulating and implementing policies for the education system as a whole.

While childhood education has a clear effect on learning in later life, there is also a significant impact of parents' education on children's motivations and educational attainment.

Hence, it is unrealistic to expect that educational inequality can be removed by isolated action with either the education of children or the education of adults. Substantial results can only be obtained by joint action in both areas.

A comprehensive development of society's total provision for education in the perspective of lifelong education is needed, allowing for both formal and non-formal education.

The importance of involvement of trade unions, co-operatives and workers' educational organizations in the eradication of illiteracy and the promotion of basic education for all was repeatedly stressed.

Education should build on the cultural values of the people, respect the need for instruction to be carried out in the mother tongue and open up for general participation both in the creation and enjoyment of culture.

The nature of the major problems facing humanity lead to the conclusion that there is a need for an increased emphasis on civic and political education.

In view of the present inequalities the participants put emphasis on correcting imbalances by positive discrimination in favour of women, migrant workers, unemployed youth and other groups that were socially and educationally underprivileged.

Instruments for achieving wider establishment and use of educational opportunities would include measures to facilitate the access of workers and peasants and their families to education programmes such as an extension of paid educational leave, in accordance with ILO Convention No. 140, day and evening care for children and educational facilities at the place of work.

Education and scientific and technological change

The increasingly rapid pace of scientific and technological change combined with the unprecedented development of the means of communication poses both challenges and opportunities for education. On one hand, this change can increase economic and educational inequalities, both inside and between nations. On the other hand, the means for much faster diffusion of knowledge creates vastly increased opportunities for education.

Science and technology must be adapted to serve the development of the human being in all its dimensions. They must be used to improve the quality of life.

Current applications of new technology to the work process are tending to concentrate power increasingly in the hands of employers and governments. For worker educators, the challenge is to develop understanding of the practical implications of the new technologies and to redress this balance of power.

The participants recognized the need to promote an adequate understanding of new technology as it is introduced into the workplace.

This requires general educational and scientific preparation before the worker enters the work-force so that he and she is equipped with a basis for assimilating future changes and for participating in further formal and non-formal education.

Then there is an ongoing need for the teaching of understanding and adaptability in the formal and non-formal education of the worker.

It was observed that the time is long overdue for workers to be associated with decisions concerning the choice of technology.

While noting the need to retrain workers to adapt to and master technological change, the participants felt it was necessary to promote broader education about science and its social effects and implications, including health and safety. For worker educators, this involves a new responsibility to help workers and their families cope with crises they are now facing because of unemployment and redundancy due to technological changes.

Increased productivity resulting from new technologies provides opportunities for a shorter working year. Time for education and retraining can be redistributed through the life cycle; part-time training during working hours should be encouraged. Unemployed workers should, with a view to their social reinsertion, have access to training which would enable them to occupy qualified employment.

Some development theories have proposed an initial concentration on literacy, subsequent priority for mid-level education and a later emphasis on higher education. In discussion, it became clear that such a sequence would result in obsolescence of already highly skilled workers. An integrated strategy would require action over the full range of educational levels simultaneously.

The relation of adult education, particularly for workers, to a new international economic order, a new international information order, the maintenance of peace, disarmament, respect for and exercise of human rights

The participants agreed that the teaching of human rights, peace, disarmament and the new international economic order and the new international information order be given a more significant place in education, both directly provided by workers' and peasants' organizations and by other agencies following workers' demands.

In view of the present economic world crisis, participants recognized the urgency of moving towards a new international economic order with more equitable economic relationships between industrialized countries and those producing mainly primary products. It is unrealistic to assume that such a move can be made by a few statesmen, without general public understanding of the issues involved. Widespread education in economic, social and political affairs, national and international, can contribute much to create a climate of mutual understanding in which acceptable solutions can be worked out.

The participants emphasized that trade unions and co-operatives, and other popular educational movements, have a major role to play in this change. They stressed the need to:

encourage teachers to integrate these themes into their teaching;

produce learning materials in this area;

establish contact with and utilize the expertise of governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with international affairs;

use international organizations as a clearing-house for the acquisition and translation of existing study materials;

reach the largest possible number of persons through the media;

combat prejudices of race, religion, nationality, sex and age;

promote the exchange of information on these subjects;

revise manuals, textbooks and audio-visual materials in light of the above.

Participation of workers' and peasants' organizations in the conception and implementation of educational policies

The participants asserted that workers and peasants and their organizations had vital interests, and an important role to play in shaping educational policies.

In the first place, there was general agreement that the concerns of workers and peasants should be for the educational system as a whole, ranging from early childhood education to education for the elderly, and spanning formal, non-formal and informal education.

Secondly, the links between education and the various aspects of life, or roles in life, should be made evident and strengthened. This would, for example link education to social, economic and cultural activities. Thus, education would not only be lifelong, but also 'life-wide'.

Thirdly, noting that the share of the gross national product allocated to education had tended to decline in recent years, it was felt that workers' and peasants' organizations needed to exert pressure to increase their share of the national product devoted to education.

Fourthly, in addition to exerting influence on society's provision of education, it was emphasized that workers' and peasants' organizations had a direct role to perform in providing education under their own auspices--for example in literacy--and to ensure horizontal and vertical mobility in education, and in society.

Fifthly, there is a continuing need to train activists and cadres in trade unions and co-operative organizations. It is particularly important to equip the activists to face the responsibilies mentioned above. Governments should facilitate this training.

In assuming these additional responsibilities, trade unions and co-operative organizations can draw on the wealth of human resources and educational experience developed in their present programmes.

Where collective bargaining mechanisms exist, they can be used to obtain additional gains for workers and their families. Yet, these are not sufficient in themselves.

Worker educators, then, face a double challenge: to make fuller use of existing institutional structures for participation in decision-making and negotiation and to develop such other mechanisms of consultation and concertation as may be needed to bring to bear the workers' educational interests at the place of work in the industry, and at national and international levels.

It was recognized that in some countries democratic structures for consultation and negotiation do not function because of various kinds of oppression. Participants felt the need for educational advancement of workers and peasants to be so urgent that if it cannot be achieved with the support of governments, what was possible should be done without such support, if necessary, even in opposition to an oppressive dictatorship.

The involvement of workers and peasants in all decisions about their education is not only right from a pedagogical point of view; it also serves as useful experience for fuller participation in decision-making in the enterprise and society in general.

Many advantages were seen in developing relations of co-operation and mutual support between workers' and peasants' organizations, organizations of the teaching profession, adult education associations, institutions of higher education, cultural institutions, etc. Such co-operation would also make it easier to tackle tasks of research and evaluation, development of teaching materials and methods and training of personnel both full time and volunteers.

The Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education: measures to be taken by trade union and co-operative organizations to facilitate its implementation

The participants reiterated the importance of involving workers' and peasants' organizations in the implementation of the Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education, although some felt that the Recommendation, as adopted by Unesco's General Conference, Nairobi, 1976, was not far-reaching enough.

The International Charter of Workers' Education, adopted by the 12th General Conference of the International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations in Sormarka, Norway, in June 1980 was cited as another source of inspiration.

Mention was made of the importance of the education of women and the attention this should be given in implementing the Recommendation.

The dissemination and sharing of information was considered a pre-condition for enabling trade unions and workers' organizations to enact the measures outlined.

The use of the service and expertise of other organizations and agencies to implement adult education policies was emphasized.

It was felt that there should be mass mobilization of public opinion in favour of adult education legislation, in line with national educational and economic planning.

As a preparation for the 4th International Conference on Adult Education, it was proposed that Unesco, in co-operation with workers' and peasants' and other adult education organizations in several countries should develop a debate around

the publication on 'The Education of Adults: A World Perspective' and obtain through discussion papers the co-operation of about twenty National Commissions to have it published in the languages of their country.

It was also proposed that Unesco, in co-operation with the National Commissions and the national organizations concerned should launch a number of large-scale operational adult education projects, which would serve as a test to bring out the true world problems in this field and their optimal solution.

In the struggle against illiteracy, the importance of voluntary literacy teachers, drawn from youth and workers, was stressed.

Regional and international co-operation between trade union and co-operative organizations in the field of education

The meeting considered that the exchange of information between trade unions, co-operative organizations and workers' educational organizations should be improved.

Appreciation was expressed for Unesco's Programme of Travel Grants for Workers' Education Leaders and it was suggested that, in future, more exchanges should take place between trade union and co-operative members.

Participants recognized the possibility of the creation in certain countries of multi-purpose co-operatives as a supplement to the action of trade unions. In the developing countries, in particular, this co-operation was absolutely essential.

A participant stressed the need for more co-operation amongst trade unions themselves.

Co-operation should be encouraged at local, regional and national level to ensure specific programmes are provided for the elderly, women, migrant workers, the unemployed, their families and other underprivileged groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Aims and roles of adult education

Adult education--and all education--should be designed:

to facilitate personal fulfilment of the whole person (as workers, citizens, consumers and bearers of culture), i.e. to know more and to 'be more';

to motivate and equip learners to struggle against deprivation, exploitation, oppression, dependency and cultural colonialism, and to take part in basic structural and socio-economic changes (e.g. agrarian reform and industrialization in line with the interests of the people);

to prepare workers and peasants for effective participation in decision-making at all levels in their places of work, communities, organizations and in government;

to enable learners to undertake self-help projects;

to enable workers to improve their standard of living and their personal development and that of their society;

to spread a mastery of science and technologies, particularly those imported by transnational corporations;

to teach, and to be a living example of pluralism and democracy.

2. Target groups

While all adults should have access to education, specific efforts are required with respect to groups which, for different reasons, are particularly subject to educational deprivation or otherwise require particular educational attention:

the masses of workers and peasants, whether or not they are members of trade unions;

immigrant workers;

women, whether they work at home or elsewhere;

young adults;

the unemployed;

the aged (retired or still working);

staff of trade unions and co-operatives.

3. Contents

Adult education should strive to achieve a balance between vocational training and general/cultural subject-matter, and between individual and collective concerns. Notwithstanding such balance, certain themes are suggested as deserving increased attention in adult education and training programmes:

the development of a critical and political consciousness;

the present, unjust economic order and the call for a new international economic order, and a new international information order;

peace, arms reduction and the need for tolerance and co-operation and respect of human rights;

other major social, political, economic and cultural issues;

trade union and co-operative matters (history, procedures, prospects, etc);

possibilities for alternative forms of economic production;

health, hygiene, nutrition, safety, child-care and home skills;

consumer education.

4. Methods and materials

There is a general need to reassess and renew the teaching approaches used in adult education. This process should take the following considerations into account:

the need for horizontal learning that refuses to separate the 'cultivated' from the 'ignorant' and recognizes that all adults have experiences to share;

the integration, rather than separation, of scientific/technological topics with subjects relating to general culture;

experiential learning in management and in living and working 'differently';

linkages between learning and production;

the necessity of overcoming the dichotomy between those who think/plan and those who execute;

the role of Unesco, with regard to peace education, in replacing the vocabulary of war with a vocabulary of peace;

the need to view textbooks and audio-visual and other learning materials as something other than as merchandise subjected to the laws of market and profit.

5. Institutional forms

Much more imaginative scrutiny than at present should be given to different kinds and combinations of institutional forms facilitating the organization of adult education, including inter alia:

non-formal education with its special advantages such as improved adult learner confidence, collective learning in adults' own environments, participant identification of educational and training needs, and cost-effectiveness;

more systematic recourse to facilities at the workplace that could be used for adult education programmes;

a special role for co-operative enterprises in educational programmes;

the recognition that adult (and all) education should be of concern to all interested parties, with the consequent right and responsibility of such groups as trade unions, co-operatives and popular educational movements to participate fully in the design and implementation of relevant programmes, which in turn will require enhanced co-operation on the part of teachers and their organizations and their intervention at the place of work.

6. Role and participation of trade unions, co-operatives and popular educational movements

It is stressed that not nearly enough is being done to ensure the full participation of workers, peasants, trade unions, co-operatives and popular educational movements in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of formal and non-formal adult education policies and programmes. Necessary measures in this respect include:

much closer and more systematic relations between workers' and teachers' representative organizations;

joint initiatives of international trade union and co-operative bodies, addressed to United Nations agencies concerned (Unesco, ILO, FAO);

enhanced co-operation between workers' and peasants' organizations;

combined efforts, above and beyond differences of method or ideology, of trade unions, teachers' organizations and co-operative bodies to achieve education for participatory democracy and the fullest possible realization of human potential.

steps by Unesco:

to associate national and international trade unions, including teachers' organizations, co-operative bodies and workers' educational organizations with all meetings, seminars or conferences concerning adult education;

to recommend to governments that teachers' organizations together with other trade unions as well as co-operative bodies, participate in the planning and implementation of adult education policies;

to recommend to governments that trade unions including teachers' organizations and co-operative bodies be fully associated with the activities undertaken by National Commissions for Unesco concerning adult education, and be given the means (such as training) to play their role in this regard;

to examine ways and means of enhancing direct co-operation in the field of adult education between Unesco and national and international non-governmental bodies concerned, avoiding the administrative delays that sometimes occur when National Commissions are asked to serve as intermediaries (although ensuring full information of National Commissions on such direct co-operation);

to associate with its work in the field of adult education the many (mainly national) trade unions that are not represented by major international trade union organizations that already enjoy consultative status.

7. Normative action

Much greater effort needs to be expended that at present on: (a) making more widely known existing normative instruments on adult education, and (b) preparing new instruments. The following should be taken into account in this regard:

measures should be taken to establish a legal framework for a system enabling trade unions, including teachers' organizations, co-operative bodies and workers' educational organizations, to participate effectively in policy-making regarding adult education;

all these movements could help spread information about--and encourage implementation of--the Recommendation on the Development of Education, as follows:

distribute the Recommendation widely among their members;

mount campaigns to sensitize public opinion regarding the Recommendation's provisions;

take initiatives to support the Recommendation in contacts with governments;

intensify their own activities, in particular by:

(a) expanding their concerns, by allocating necessary personnel to encompass measures foreseen by the Recommendation;

(b) reassessing their activities so as to view them as educational opportunities to be taken advantage of according to the content of the Recommendation.

8. Preparation for the IVth International Conference on Adult Education

Trade unions, teachers' organizations, co-operative bodies and workers' educational organizations should, in co-operation with Unesco, take all appropriate measures to participate as fully as possible in the presentation and organization of the conference. Unesco should envisage the following steps:

encourage national authorities to associate workers', teachers' and co-operative organizations with preparatory activities;

organize a symposium including participants from the international teacher federation and trade union and co-operative internationals to enhance mutual co-operation with a view to the conference;

request trade unions and co-operative organizations to prepare documentation for the conference on their activities in the field of adult education and to present to the conference their views on certain of its subthemes;

set up one or more working groups composed of these organizations to examine the conference's themes.

Trade union, co-operatives and workers' educational organizations should mobilize their members to influence public opinion on the importance of adult and community education.

ANNEX I

AGENDA

1. Opening session

2. Election of officers

3. Consideration of the provisional schedule of work

4. The importance of education--general as well as vocational, civic and cultural--for workers, particularly as a means to reduce social inequalities

5. Education and scientific and technological change

6. The relation of adult education, particularly for workers, to a new international economic order, a new international information order, the maintenance of peace, disarmament, respect for and exercise of human rights

7. Participation of workers' and peasants' organizations in the conception and implementation of educational policies

8. The Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education: measures to be taken by trade union and co-operative organizations to facilitate its implementation

9. Regional and international co-operation between trade union and co-operative organizations in the field of education

10. Adoption of the report

11. Closing session

ANNEX II

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